

DANA ROHRBACHER
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July 26, 2012

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
US Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Madam Secretary,

Last February, a member of the ruling party in the Republic of Azerbaijan called on the government to change the country's name to "North Azerbaijan." Siyavush Novruzov, a Member of Parliament, suggested that the 16 million Azeris who live in northwest Iran (South Azerbaijan) should be united in a single nation. The land considered South Azerbaijan has almost twice the population of the Azerbaijan Republic to the north. The idea has reportedly caught on with several members of Parliament.

In Iran, the provinces inhabited mainly by ethnic Azeris are called East and West Azerbaijan by the government in Tehran, thus giving credibility to the claims made by the government in Baku that the homeland of the Azeri is divided. Indeed, the territory was split between Russia and Persia by the Treaty of Turkmenchay in 1828, without the consent of the Azeris. Russia is no longer a factor, as the Republic of Azerbaijan gained its independence in 1991 when the Soviet Union disintegrated. The Iran of today is very different from the Persia of nearly two centuries ago.

The Azerbaijan question has come forward again due to recent news stories about budding military cooperation between Israel and Azerbaijan. It would be wise for the United States to encourage such cooperation, as the aggressive dictatorship in Tehran is our enemy as well as theirs. How the people of the Middle East identify themselves, feel loyalty and take group action is not always in accord with borders drawn on a library map. Iran has played on ethnic and religious groups to advance its influence in Lebanon and Iraq. The United States should look for opportunities to do the same in key areas. Aiding the legitimate aspirations of the Azeri people for independence poses a greater danger to the Iranian tyrants than the threat of bombing its underground nuclear research bunkers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dana Rohrabacher".

Dana Rohrabacher
Chairman
Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee
House Committee on Foreign Affairs